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Environment Department Offers Free “Holidays @ Home” Safe Food Handling Classes

(Santa Fe, NM) — The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) will conduct two free training classes called “Holidays @ Home” to promote safe food handling during the upcoming holiday season. The training will help raise awareness of common food preparation and handling practices in home kitchens that can lead to illness.

“The holidays are a time to enjoy home-cooked meals with family and friends,” said NMED Secretary Ron Curry. “NMED, which is responsible for food safety in New Mexico, wants to do its part to make sure people practice safe food preparation to keep the holidays happy.”

Food-borne illness, or food poisoning, is often the result of mistakes, such as cross-contamination and improper food temperatures. These mistakes are among the leading causes of food-borne illness in homes. In the United States alone, contaminated food results in about 76 million illnesses, 325,000 hospitalizations, and 5,200 deaths each year. Nearly 60 percent of illnesses related to food occur in private homes.

The training will cover a variety of topics designed to help ease anxieties and questions that often arise from holiday food preparation, including the major causes of food-borne illness, choosing the correct food products, alternative cooking methods, handling leftovers, proper food temperatures, hand washing, preparing meals for large groups, and avoiding cross-contamination. The training will also feature food preparation demonstrations and alternative holiday recipes for popular holiday items, such as Caesar salad dressing, eggnog, and custard and crème pies.

The “Holidays @ Home” classes will be held November 21, 2005 in the NMED District 1 Office located at 5500 San Antonio Dr. NE. Class times are noon-1 p.m. and 2-3 p.m.

Those in attendance will receive a “Keeping the Holidays Happy” training pack, which includes helpful food safety handouts, holiday recipes, a food thermometer, and a refrigerator thermometer. Registration is limited to the first 50 registrants for each class time. Register by calling (505) 222-9500 or e-mail johnathan.gerhardt@state.nm.us (please include “Register” in the subject). Other food safety information may be found on the NMED food webpage at http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/fod/Food_Program/index.html.

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